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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 03 BEIRUT 001168

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DEPT FOR NEA/FO, NEA/ELA, PM/FO  
ALSO FOR IO ACTING A/S HOOK, PDAS WARLICK  
P FOR HMUSTAPHA AND RRANGASWAMY  
USUN FOR KHALILZAD/WOLFF/SCHEDLBAUER  
NSC FOR ABRAMS/SINGH/YERGER/MCDERMOTT

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TAGS: [OVIP](#) [PETRAEUS](#) [DAVID](#) [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [PINR](#) [UNSC](#)

MARR, MOPS, LE, SY, IZ

SUBJECT: LEBANON: PETRAEUS AND SLEIMAN DISCUSS SYRIAN TRIP,  
REGIONAL TERRORISM, MILITARY ASSISTANCE TO LEBANON

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires a.i. William Grant for reasons 1.4 (b)  
and (d).

SUMMARY

¶1. (C) In an August 6 meeting with visiting General David Petraeus, President Michel Sleiman outlined three objectives for his upcoming meeting with Syrian President Bashar Asad. Most important, Sleiman said, is to initiate a diplomatic exchange between the two countries. Additionally, Sleiman plans to discuss not only demarcation of the Lebanon-Syrian border but control of it as well. Lastly, Sleiman said he would raise the issue of Lebanese citizens detained and missing in Syria, although he is not optimistic that these people will be found alive.

¶2. (S) On regional terrorism, Sleiman agreed with Petraeus's request that he raise with Syrian President Asad the necessity of stemming the flow of foreign fighters into Iraq assisted by facilitators in Syria. Sleiman further commented that a fair solution to the Palestinian problem in Lebanon would go a long way in solving Lebanon's problems by eliminating the major problem that extremist groups have exploited to advance their agendas.

¶3. (C) Sleiman thanked Petraeus for continued U.S. military and political cooperation and assistance. Sleiman noted that his priorities were additional training and equipment for Lebanese Special Forces Commandos and the intelligence structure behind them. End summary.

¶4. (SBU) During his one day visit to Lebanon on August 6, Commanding General of the Multi-National Force-Iraq General David Petraeus met with Lebanese President Michel Sleiman at Baabda Palace. Petraeus was accompanied by Colonel Mike Bell, Director-Commander's Initiatives Group; Sadi Othman, Cultural Advisor and Translator; Major Joel Rayburn, Commander's Staff; and Lieutenant Colonel Everett Spain, Aide-de-Camp. Also in attendance were Charge d'Affaires, a.i. William Grant; A/DCM Susanne Rose; Defense Attache Lieutenant Colonel David Alley; Chief, Office of Defense Cooperation Lieutenant Colonel Andrew Leinberger; and Political Officer Bridgette Walker (notetaker). President

Sleiman was accompanied by Major Fayez Mashmoushi, Personal Security Officer to the President; Adib Abi Akl, Press Advisor; and Nadine Abdelnour, Translator.

#### SLEIMAN'S AGENDA IN DAMASCUS

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¶5. (C) President Sleiman told General Petraeus he had three objectives for his upcoming visit to Syria (which we expect to occur August 13). The first is to use the visit as an initial step toward establishing diplomatic relations between Lebanon and Syria. In his view, this is an important starting point for improved relations.

¶6. (C) The second priority is demarcation and control of the Lebanon-Syria border, he continued. Particularly in the northern part of Lebanon, near Tripoli, Sleiman expressed a strong desire for better Lebanese-Syrian cooperation to control the border to the benefit of both countries. Intermittent clashes between various groups in the border region have put pressure on the LAF in the last three years. During the recent clashes between armed Alawite and Shia groups in Tripoli, Sleiman said he called Syrian President Asad to request that he close the border. His reason, he said, was to prevent any Islamic extremists from entering Lebanon through Syria. Sleiman believes the extremist threat is serious and insurgent groups like Fatah Al-Islam could "stir up trouble" in Lebanon.

¶7. (C) Additionally, Sleiman said he planned to raise with Asad the issue of Lebanese detained or missing in Syria.

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Sleiman did not know the exact numbers, but said he is not optimistic that many of these people will be found alive. However, he believes it is important to attempt to obtain some information and find some resolution and comfort for the families of these missing Lebanese citizens. Sleiman neither expects an agreement will be easily reached with Syria about the detainees, nor that the Lebanese parliament will readily approve any agreement, but he said this is important to the Lebanon-Syria relationship.

#### DISCUSSING IRAN AND IRAQ WITH SYRIANS

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¶8. (C) When asked by Petraeus whether he would discuss Iranian influence in the region with Syrian President Asad, Sleiman clearly stated "this is not my objective." However, Sleiman reaffirmed the need for Lebanon to "tie" its relationship to Syria, as well as with its Arab neighbors. With respect to Iraq, Petraeus informed Sleiman of the lucrative possibilities for Syria (i.e. benefitting from Iraqi oil wealth) in Iraq if it chooses to support the new Iraqi leadership.

#### DISCUSSING TERRORIST THREATS

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¶9. (S/NF) President Sleiman agreed to raise with Asad, at the request of Petraeus, the need to stem the flow of foreign fighters into and out of Iraq through facilitators based in Syria. General Petraeus explained this would not only help the Iraqis, but would also benefit Syria. Petraeus emphasized his assessment that the foreign fighter facilitators affiliated with Al-Qaida, such as Abu Ghadiyah, could pose a serious threat to Syria's Alawite leadership in predominantly Sunni Muslim Syria. Sleiman expressed his belief that Syria fully understands the potential threat of these facilitators because he and Asad discussed this in Paris on the margins of a Union of the Mediterranean meeting in June.

¶10. (S/NF) General Petraeus told Sleiman that he would also focus on the activities of Al-Qaida in the Levant (AQ-Levant) when he assumes CENTCOM leadership.

¶11. (C) Sleiman commented that these facilitators and other extremists groups are also a threat to Lebanon. Sleiman shared his concern about extremist groups who have wrapped themselves in the "just cause of the Palestinians" to justify their own actions. He remarked that a fair resolution of the Palestinian issue, whether return to their homeland or some other solution, would help to solve some of Lebanon's problems. Sleiman noted that the GOL had been successful in reducing extremist safe havens and bringing areas of the country under GOL control. Sleiman pointed to the history of the southern areas of Lebanon that, until 2006, were not under the full control of the GOL. Sleiman credited UNSCR 1701 and UNIFIL deployment in these areas for the improvement in Lebanese security.

PRIORITY U.S. MILITARY SUPPORT  
SHOULD GO TO SPECIAL FORCES  
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¶12. (C) President Sleiman thanked General Petraeus for U.S. military support and assistance to the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF). Sleiman remarked that the political situation in Lebanon is not easy, but is better than before. Sleiman noted that the Lebanese constitution recognizes the diversity of Lebanon through its confessional system; and the system should be respected. He added, however, the Lebanese situation is critical, and the country requires a strong, national military. He said the GOL "needs the support of the U.S. to preserve the efficacy" of the LAF. Furthermore, he welcomed the expansive military and political cooperation with the U.S., but also requested more training and better

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equipment.

¶13. (S/NF) Petraeus asked which units within the LAF could benefit from additional support, Sleiman was quick to identify the Lebanese Special Forces, particularly commandos, saying Lebanon needs "strong people" to fight the new threat: terrorism. Sleiman said Lebanon needed a larger army that was well trained and adequately equipped to intervene quickly and effectively in Lebanon, particularly against internal challenges such as terrorism and extremism. When Petraeus inquired about the capability of the intelligence structure behind the Special Forces, Sleiman responded "It is not bad, but we need assistance." Petraeus assured Sleiman of continued U.S. military assistance.

¶14. (C) General Petraeus has cleared this message.

GRANT